4: Gough E-5 (1947-1949, 1952)1958 AWll Kerala AWll
Nayar

The Killing or assault of a Nayar

outside the lineage led to feuds between lineages or between larger territorial units. 692
In Cochin, the king had more power than in Kottayam to curtail such feuds or confine [628]
them to organized duels for which a fee must be paid. Minor offences against caste [688]
law, such as dining with low caste persons, were tried by the subcaste assembly of the [564]
village and resulted in temporary excommunication of the offender's property group
and the payment of a fine to the village goddess's temple.

The *kāranavan* had the legal right to punish offences within the property group 613
and also those offences against caste law for which the caste held the property group 692
responsible until justice had been done. Incest and murder within the lineage appear [684]
to have been punished by expulsion from the *taravād* by the *kāranavan* and from the [682]
caste by the caste assembly. In cases of grave insubordination by a junior member, the [564]
kāranavan had the right to deny him maintenance or access to the ancestral house
until he mended his behavior.

Thus the supernatural agents of the village and the *taravād* primarily acted to 692
force the human authorities to carry out their judicial duties. If, for example, the 626
caste failed to excommunicate the *taravād* of an individual who had sinned against 613
its religious laws, it was believed that the village goddess would strike the village with
epidemic, flood, or some such misfortune. Similarly, if incest within the lineage went
undetected or unpunished, the lineage ghosts and the patron goddess might cause the
offenders to die or might bring misfortune on the *taravād* as a whole.

The fact that any member of the *taravād* may suffer as a result of the misdemeanors 613
of any other, carries into the realm of supernatural sanctions the collective respon- 626
sibility of the *taravād* in social and legal affairs. If a man breaks a ritual rule of the 783
caste, his whole *taravād* is polluted and liable for excommunication. If a death or
birth occurs, the whole lineage is temporarily polluted and excluded from normal
social life. At the back of these norms lies the fact that the *taravād* is an economic
and legal corporation. Its property is owned jointly, and the *taravād* is responsible [421]
for the debts of any one member. Its male members must support each other in [476]
feuds against other lineages. It is not surprising that the concept of being members
one of another in secular affairs is projected into the realm of mystical retributions. [628]

The points at which supernatural agents might replace, or act instead of, human
authorities, appear to have been those where a subordinate was wronged by one who was 769
himself a powerful authority and could manipulate the law. Thus lineage ghosts were
probably particularly effective in punishing or setting to rights misdemeanors of the 626
kāranavan himself. I am uncertain whether, in traditional law, junior members could 613
sue in court for the deposition of an erring *kāranavan*. They certainly possessed this [694] ●
right in British law, but even so, it was very difficult before 1933 to get rid of a *kārana-*
van. The lineage ghosts appear to have provided important sanctions against a *kārana-*
van's misdoings, for they brought misfortune on a *taravād* whose *kāranavan* disgraced
its reputation for hospitality or squandered its property. I was told that the former [787]
custom by which a junior member might be possessed by a ghost and voice its threats
to the *tarayād* added force to the complaints of young men who were cheated by
their *kāranavans*. The fact that only the *kāranavan* may propitiate the lineage ghosts [782]
points up both his responsibility to the ghosts to ensure good conduct and prosperity
in his *taravād*, and also his responsibility to his juniors to ensure the favor of the ghosts.

I have myself recorded no case in which lineage ghosts were believed to have actually
prevented a crime on the part of a *kāranavan*, as distinct from punishing one. V. K.